DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 436 101 FL 026 085

AUTHOR Curry, Mary Jane
TITLE A Semiotic Approach to Teaching Media Literacy to Nonnative Speakers of English.
PUB DATE 1999-04-00
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (33rd, New York, NY, March 9-13, 1999).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; Cultural Differences; Cultural Influences; Elementary Secondary Education; *English (Second Language); *Limited English Speaking; *Literacy Education; Popular Culture; *Second Language Instruction; *Semiotics; *Television Commercials
IDENTIFIERS *Media Literacy; *Nonnative Speakers; Social Anxiety

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how semiotic analysis may be useful in teaching media literacy to nonnative speakers of English (NNSs), including both immigrants and international students who plan to return to their countries. It focuses on two television shows. The first show, "Friends," covers issues and problems of contemporary urban life for members of white, middle class Generation X in which friends are thought to replace the nuclear family structure as the central unit of society. The second show, "The X-Files," deals with the supernatural and the use of futuristic technology, treating an anomalous area between two binaries: the technologies and epistemologies of postmodern society and people's fascination with and fear of the extraterrestrial and the notion that more intelligent life exists on other planets. This paper examines: media literacy and popular culture; social anxiety and the anomalous on television; naturalization and representation; modes of address; how advertising constructs the ideal viewer; stances for decoding; and doing media literacy with NNS students. (Contains 14 references.) (SM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 436 101

A Semiotic Approach to Teaching Media Literacy to Nonnative Speakers of English

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

TESOL Conference, April 1999
Mary Jane Curry
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Mary Jane Curry

With children in the United States sitting in front of the television as many hours, on average, as they sit in the classroom, calls have increased for media literacy to teach students how to watch, interpret, and resist the media. Some researchers and critics of the mass media consider media literacy necessary to protect children from the pernicious effects of modern (visual) mass communication. Douglas Kellner, for example, argues that we must provide students with the ability to "resist manipulation by consumer capitalism" (1988:43), whose primary vehicle is mass media advertising and program content. Stephen Brookfield urges that adults be encouraged to develop a "critical skepticism regarding the products of the mass media. Brookfield describes such work as "*ideological detoxification*" from "simplistic explanations of complex political reality" (1986:151).

Because, as Stuart Hall posits, "much of television's power to signify lay in its visual and documentary character--its inscription of itself as merely a `window on the world', showing things as they really are" (1982:75), critical media literacy can offer a counterweight to the power of the media. For semiotic anaylis, Ann DeVaney notes, "a television program may be thought of as a text in which meaning has been intentionally encoded. It is ripe for decoding or interpretation" (1991:243).

Media Literacy and Popular Culture

Other theorists acknowledge the permanence of the mass media, and arguing that in

FL 026 085

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

addition to its negative effects, it simultaneously offers viewers pleasure and an accessible range of manifestations of cultural meanings. In education, for instance, Giroux and Simon propose taking popular culture--including mass media--as appropriate material for schooling. "Popular culture and pedagogy represent important terrains of cultural struggle which offer both subversive discourses and important theoretical elements through which it becomes possible to rethink schooling as a viable and important form of cultural politics" (1989:238). Shor points out that students disillusioned by traditional text-based curricula are often more excited by the use of popular media as textbooks. "Student interest in everyday subjects has led me to use themes from everyday life for critical inquiry" (Shor & Freire 1987:6).

In a visually dominated society, students more often may identify with popular images rather than words from canonical texts, making visual media highly relevant as curricular material. As Angus and Jhally point out,

> In contemporary culture the media have become central to the constitution of social identity. It is not just that media messages have become important forms of influence on individuals. We also identify and construct ourselves as social beings through the mediation of images. This is not simply a case of people being dominated by images, but of people seeking and obtaining pleasure through the experience of the consumption of these images (1989:7, quoted in Dietzel & Pagenhart 1995:129).

Visual media thus become implicated in the construction of identity at least among people in contemporary industrialized countries; at the same time these media do very effectively convey messages of "consumer capitalism." How can a pedagogy of media literacy account for this range of functions and meanings? How can teachers teach how to evaluate how the media works without also devaluing the pleasurable aspects of the mass media? As Buckingham notes, "Critical discourses about the media often embody a form of intellectual cynicism, and a sense of superiority

to other people. They may result in a superficial irony or a contempt for popular pleasures which is merely complacent" (1993:146).

In this paper I will try to unravel how the threads of semiotic analysis may be useful in teaching media literacy to nonnative speakers of English (NNSs), including both immigrants and international students who plan to return to their countries. Because the focus of English language instruction points learners to just that, language, and less to images, sounds, and other forms of communication, it is important to consider how nonlinguistic messages also produce cultural meanings. "Meaning resides so strongly and pervasively in other systems of meaning [than verbal language], in a multiplicity of visual, aural, behavioral, and other codes, that a concentration on words alone is not enough. . . . no single code can be successfully studied or fully understood in isolation" (Hodge & Kress 1988:vii). Television programs thus offer a fuller, multilayered text with which to engage these semiotic theories than print media does alone.

The television shows "Friends" and "The X-Files" emerged as the two most popular programs in an informal survey I conducted in November 1997 of 23 of my NNS students [make into footnote] (15 male, 8 female; from 18 to 37 years old; mainly from Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong). Examining these programs will allow me to show how semiotic theories can be applied, with concrete examples.

A general function of media literacy is to demystify and defamiliarize the production of images (and text) in the media. This process can occur on many levels from a undertaking a minute deconstructive analysis of an image or text to examining the context of the production of the image to questioning the social forces that enable such production. Many writers link media literacy to critical thinking skills, which can also be engaged on multiple levels. In addition to raising issues of

how arguments are constructed and deployed, critical media literacy might ask such questions as: Who is allowed to speak in this medium? Who has access to the media? Whose voices are heard and omitted? Who is spoken for and by whom? What subjectivities do media offer viewers, and which of these might be the "ideal subject" for whom programs and advertisements are designed? How do viewers who do not fit neatly into the model of the ideal subject viewer respond to, relate to, and resist such constructions and the messages that circulate in media?

Societal Anxiety and the Anomalous on Television

In teaching media literacy, semiotic theories, including those that can be considered structuralis, poststructuralist, and postmodern, offer useful approaches to examining texts as embodiments of a society's myths, ideologies, and hegemonic struggles. In particular, we can look at which issues of cultural anxiety arise in the content of both television programs and commercials. For example, "The X-Files" deals with the supernatural and the use of futuristic technology, treating an "anomalous" area between two binaries, in Levi-Strauss's terms, the technologies and epistemologies of (post)modern society and our fascination with and fear of the extraterrestrial and the notion that more intelligent life exists on other planets.

"Friends," on the other hand, covers the issues and problems of contemporary urban life for members of white, middle-class Generation X--a life in which friends are thought to replace the nuclear family structure as the central unit of society. Compared with the life stages of more traditional societies, the twentysomething members of the cast of "Friends" comprise an anomalous category that straddles the border of childhood and adolescence in their postponement or rejection of marriage and children but crosses over into adulthood in holding jobs and living apart from their

families. They "partake of characteristics of both the binarily opposed" categories (Fiske 1990:117), in this case, for example, youth and adulthood.

In the "Friends" episode that aired on December 11, 1997, a crisis of lost youth enveloped the male characters on the show: once they shed their youthful partying habits, they needed Gandolf, an out-of-town friend, to take them on all-night binges; when the friend cancelled and they tried to replicate their experiences, they found their youthful stamina gone. After hitting a few bars they end up in one of the show's central venues, the cafe Central Perk, and order two decafs and a "hot water with lemon."

This episode serves as a minor contemporary example of a rite of passage from youth to adulthood in a process that Kottak describes as including "separation, margin, and aggregation" (Kottak ??:44). The male characters separate themselves from the female, embark on unknown adventures (in a previous adventure with Gandolf they had ended up on a fishing boat in Nova Scotia) in the marginal period, and enact aggregation by returning to Central Perk, where the whole group hangs out (although without the women). All-night partying is confirmed as a male domain when Joey, stereotyped as a dumb Italian gigolo, responds to Ross's desire to "listen to Kenny G and take a bath" by saying, "Hey, we're 29--we're not women." The figure of Gandolf, the wizard from *The Lord of the Rings,* may serve as the guide or "personal guardian spirit" (Kottak ??: 43) to the "Friends" characters, unable to create their own adventure without him.

In addition to the subject matter, the narrative structure of the television program or advertisement itself works (or fails) to resolve the issues raised. Hodge and Kress point out that the seeming simplicity of Aristotle's narrative cycle--beginning, middle, and end--can be viewed more complexly as a "classic narrative of the status quo" in a cycle of equilibrium,

disturbance/complication, and crisis resolution/return to equilibrium (Hodge & Kress 1988:230), as The "Friends" partying crisis exemplifies. In fact, television has been criticized for its readiness to resolve all of the problems of a storyline neatly and tidily in 30-minute segments. What may seem unrealistic about this cycle is perhaps not its tidiness but how quickly it transpires, since much of Western literature follows a similar narrative structure. Interestingly, despite its positivist claim in the opening scenes that "The truth is out there," "The X-Files" resists this pattern, leaving us with unanswerable questions without attempting to explain them.

Naturalization and Representation

Television programs and commercials can also demonstrate the naturalization of cultural practices, "a shaping of the whole ideological environment: a way of representing the order of things which endowed its limiting perspectives with that natural or divine inevitability which makes them appear universal, natural, and coterminous with `reality' itself" (Hall 1982:65). In "Friends," for example, the gender separation in the apartments of the show's male and female characters naturalizes their gender roles and reinforces a traditional morality that frowns on premarital opposite-sex cohabitation (whether romantic or not). The process of identifying and explicating these seemingly obvious characteristics of media productions challenges us to rethink our basic assumptions, which goes against the grain of much media consumption. Gramsci called the "inventory of traditional ideas, the forms of episodic thinking which provide us with the taken-for-granted elements of our practical knowledge . . . `common sense'" (Hall 1982:73). Much of media literacy depends on understanding what comprises this societal common sense.

In "Friends" the process of naturalization encourages viewers to see as commonsensical the

occupations of the women, despite their strong gender stereotypes: assistant to a fashion buyer at Bloomingdale's, professional cook/caterer, and folk singer/ waitress. The December 11 episode incorporated jokes about women sleeping their way to the top, as Rachel's boss half jokingly tells her that she "had to sleep with the ugliest guy to get [my first] job." The implication of the joke, however, seems to be that women no longer have to exchange sexual favors for professional advancement. If society considers such treatment of female occupational roles and experiences normal, seeing them on television encourages viewers to conceptualize television as a mimetic media, reflecting a "reality" that many viewers may feel they know from their own experience.

However, as Hall notes, "representation is a very different notion from that of reflection. It implies the active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping: not merely the transmitting of an already-existing meaning, but the more active labour of making things mean." Thus in media literacy, "the message [has] now to be analysed, not in terms of its manifest `message', but in terms of its ideological structuration" (Hall 1982:64). A primary task in teaching media literacy is to begin to uncover what this "active work" involves, identifying the choices that were made to include or exclude topic, character, scene, etc., and what these choices represent in terms of dominant ideologies.

Barthes (1972) offers the concept of "exnomination" by which media remove counter-dominant ideas, messages, symbols, or images from the scope of discourse. Their structuring absence essential to the framing of the world view presented, if unremarked. On "Friends," therefore, the question of why some jobs are more open to women than others rarely arises. As Hall notes, hegemonic "dominance was accomplished at the unconscious as well as the conscious levels: to see it as a property of the system of relations involved, rather than as the overt and intentional

biases of individuals" (1982:85). Thus when Rachel's female boss intentionally prevents her from getting a better job, the show presents the conflict as personality-dependent instead of part of a system of discrimination against women or the insecurities of an older women in the image-heavy fashion industry.

Another important concept in teaching media literacy is the notion of ideology--or, ideologies--defined as "a system of coding reality and not a determined set of coded messages" (Veron 1971:68 in Hall 1982:71). Looking at how different meaning-making frameworks can operate at the same time in a text opens up various interpretive possibilities for viewers/students. In some cases ideologies can be represented or activated by one word. Barthes, for example, "argued that the associative field of meanings of a single term--its connotative field of reference--was *par excellence,* the domain through which ideology invaded the language system. It did so by exploiting the associative, the variable, the connotative `social value' of language" (Hall 1982:79). On "Friends," the use of the term "dude," particularly with the particular inflection given it by the male characters calls up the world of white, male, middle-class, carefree, former partyers; this formulation of the term has entered the slang of certain groups, but it usually names only men (even if used by women) and only in casual situations.

In addition to the use of language and visual images in constructing ideologies, "many other codes play a part, including clothing codes, gestures, and so on, and others, such as architectural codes, which establish not simply the status of a context but also what pattern of relationships will prevail in it" (Hodge and Kress 1988:45). The subtle way in which details such as clothing contribute to communicating an ideology is evident in two connected episodes of "The X-Files" (December 7 and 14, 1997), for example, dealing with FBI Agent Dana Scully's infertility. Her

discovery of a child that was created from one of her ova (which had been completely removed during a month-long abduction some years earlier) focuses the program's crisis on how her thwarted maternal feelings and desire to adopt this terminally ill child threaten her professionalism. In the first episode, Scully's fairly conservative clothing includes a low-cut, breast-enhancing top, presenting a bit of cleavage throughout the maternal drama. In contrast, her application to adopt the child is rejected because of her commitment to her "dangerous," high-pressure career at the FBI.

The ambiguity with which "The X-Files" treats Scully's dilemma between career and motherhood illustrates how different ideologies can circulate within the same text. Hall connects these competing ideologies to the struggle for hegemony in a society. "Any society/culture tends, with varying degrees of closure, to impose its classifications of the social and cultural and political world. These constitute a dominant cultural order, though it is neither univocal or uncontested" (Hall ??:134). In contrast to the women on "Friends," Scully--both medical doctor and FBI agent--appears as a competent professional as well as highly attractive. Her cool demeanor and commitment to her job, however--coupled with the subject of these episodes--indicate that her embodiment of a feminist ideal comes with a price. The women on "Friends" may not have high-powered careers, but they will get their men in the end. Thus the independence that they exhibit by living and working in Manhattan as young single people is likely a temporary prelude to matrimony; Scully's future is not so predictable.

Female viewers therefore can compare their own situations to points along this continuum of ideologies of womanhood and professionalism. By seeing a range of positions for modern-day young woman to occupy (since direct representations of matrimony and motherhood are excluded from both programs), viewers may more comfortably accept their own situations.

Barthes's conception of myths as the collection of associations surrounding an image, symbol, or figure offers another useful approach to media literacy. "Myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification and making contingency appear eternal" (Barthes 1972:142). One shot in "The X-Files" after Scully's daughter dies presents a close-up of a stained-glass Madonna and child above Scully's mournful head. The connotations of goodness and purity that attach to the Christian figures of Mary and Jesus thereby subtly play behind the drama of the program, Scully's bizarre conception story even resonating with the asexual manner in which Mary conceived Jesus.

Viewers--especially those who make "dominant-hegemonic code" readings of media texts (Hall ??:137)--consent to the hegemonic positions embodied in television shows partly by supporting the programs and their advertisers, even incorporating elements of the programs and advertisements into life by discussing them and by patronizing the advertisers. At the same time, as what happens on TV appears natural and as a reflection of normalcy, viewers may work to adjust ourselves to fit our lives to match that image of "normalcy." Especially for women, the idealized images of women presented in the media, not only in commercials but in the bodies of the actors themselves, serve to discount the acceptability of all other body types and bring ideal body image to the forefront of our minds--and bodies if we work to achieve that ideal.

Modes of Address

How do viewers feel comfortable identifying with and relating to characters, storylines, settings, and all the other elements that comprise media texts? Ellsworth's explanation of mode of address as a useful way to consider this relationship is a useful way to consider this relationship:

> In order for a film [or television program or advertisement] to work for an audience, in order for it simply to make sense to a viewer, or maker her laugh, root for a character, suspend her disbelief, cry, scream, feel satisfied at the end--the viewer must enter into a particular relationship with the film's story and image system. . . . there is a "position" within power relations and interests, within gender and racial constructions, within knowledge, to which the film's story and visual pleasure is addressed. It's from that "subject position" that the film's assumption about who the audience is work with the least effort, contradiction, or slippage. (1997:23-24).

In Althusser's terms, television programs interpellate their viewers, naming their ideal subject positions even as they seek conformity to the norms they present. The "Friends" theme song gives instant clues to its ideal viewer; in fact, the song addresses the viewer directly by using the second person "you":

> So no one told you life was gonna be this way.
> The job's a joke, you're broke, your love life's (??) way
> It's like you're always stuck in second gear.
> Well, it hasn't been your day, your week, your month, or even your year.
> But I'll be there for you
> . . .
> Like I've been there before.
> I'll be there for you.
> 'Cuz you're there for me, too.

The neo-folksy musical style of the theme song, reminiscent of the Beatles, underlines this interpellation, reinforcing the identification of the audience as younger than Baby Boomers who would listen to Dylan or other '60s folk musicians, but too mainstream to listen to alternative rock, heavy metal, or country-Western music.

Advertising Constructs the Ideal Viewer

In addition to the modes of address used by the television program itself, the commercials shown during and between the programs contribute to the creation of the ideal subject positions and

the lack of "slippage" between the ideal and real viewers. Of the 29 commercials shown before, during, and after one half-hour episode of "Friends," eight promoted other NBC programs; four each hyped current films and cars or sport utility vehicles; five promoted restaurants or food products; three pushed appliances or tools; one each sold flu medicine, furniture, and perfume--Happy by Clinique.

The 36 commercials shown for the hour-long episode of "The X-Files" included 15 for television programs on the FOX network; four each for movies, restaurants, and computer technology or batteries; three for stores; two for cars; and two for drinks (Pepsi and Miller Lite). While a full-scale analysis of the individual commercials presented would yield interesting clues about the different segments of the ideal audience for whom the programs are constructed, some generalities will suffice here. The commercials for these two programs have much in common with each other: They envision a young, white, heterosexual audience interested in television and films, attracted to the convenience of fast-food and other restaurants. Commercials for durable products were in the minority. Not surprisingly, "The X-Files" audience attracts the addition of high technology commercials, particularly those for Microsoft and Intel computer products as well as Duracell batteries. Presumably viewers of "The X-Files" are more likely to be involved in high technology as well as have an interest in the extraterrestrial and paranormal compared with viewers of "Friends," for which the commercials had a more domestic feel.

In addition to the products promoted in the commercials, aspects of their production are an important subject for media analysis. DeVaney notes that in addition to words and images, "units of construction such as frame, shot and sequence in television may be considered signs" (1991:252) that may also be decoded. Commercials aimed at a younger audience, for example, are more likely

to use tilted camera angles, faster editing of sequences, brighter graphics and visuals, and more and louder music than those aimed at older viewers. The choice of actors in commercials as well reflects the producers' notions of the ideal viewer; the age, race, gender, and class signs in commercials are intentionally encoded.

However, television is a broadcast medium reaching millions of viewers; its producers therefore must find a balance between targeting a narrow band of ideal viewers and a broader spectrum of viewers who may not fit the ideal image. The audience can be envisioned demographically, as some characteristics mentioned above touch on, or ideologically, as the next section discusses--and in many cases the demographic and ideological overlap.

Stances for Decoding

How can these semiotic theories be useful in teaching media literacy to ESL students? First, we must recognize that different audiences find multiple readings at different times. In this case, then, a traditional "banking" pedagogy in which the teacher puts a predetermined, encapsulated knowledge into the students' heads is grossly insufficient (for all students but) particularly for students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Teachers must therefore expect a range of interpretations of the media they analyze with students as well as be able to identify the dominant myths and codes of the society in which they teach. Hall notes that "dominant definitions connect events, implicitly or explicitly, to grand totalizations . . . they take `large views' of the issues: they relate events to the `national interest' or the level of geo-politics" (E/D:137). These same definitions are readily available in commercially produced curricula, so dominant media representations fit comfortably with messages students and teachers are already working with.

Without critical distance of their own, however, teachers may have difficulty both explaining the dominant definitions of the society and in deploying the strategies of media analysis mentioned here--but to teach media literacy they should develop these explanations and strategies.

The notions of mode of address (interpellation), myths, exnomination, normalization, and competing ideologies can be used in deconstructing media. Furthermore, Hall formulates three positions that consumers of media may occupy when decoding messages: the dominant-hegemonic position--"When the viewer takes the connoted meaning . . . and decodes the message in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded" (??:136); the position that employs a negotiated code--"a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements . . . it operates with exceptions to the rule" (137); and a stance using the oppositional code, decoding "in a globally contrary way . . . [that] detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference" (137-8).

For nonnative speakers of English, media literacy offers the possibility not simply to witness another society's representation of itself to itself, but a way to make sense of what is viewed. Few immigrants or international students will have had no exposure to media products from the United States, however. Students from other cultures can contrast what they see in the U.S. media with what they know of their own cultures and the global stereotypes about North American life. At the same time, learning the hegemonic practices of another society provides new ways of examining our own culture and experiences.

The dominant meanings encode as well the relationship of the United States as a world power to the countries from which NNS students come. The status of English as the global language of capitalism is embodied and reinforced in U.S. media products. "The domains of

`preferred meanings' have the whole social order embedded in them as sets of meanings, practices, and beliefs: the everyday knowledge of social structures, of `how things work for all practice purposes in this culture', the rank order of power and interest and the structure of legitimations, limits and sanctions" (Hall ??:134). Many NNS students have sophisticated understandings of the global positionings of the United States and other nations and can use media literacy as a means of articulating these understandings.

Media literacy can help students unpack how representations of the other reflect the dominant values of American society, which is important not only for students living in the United States but also as global capitalism increases its reach. Barthes (1972) tells us that how a society represents the other tells it as much or more about itself. The outright absence of various "others" in much media representation is clearly also telling.

Other issues may arise for NNS students: whether their previous images of the United States and cultural stereotypes mesh with their lived experience as students or immigrants as well as with what they see in media. How the construction of difference and similarity affects students who may not have seen themselves as "ethnic," "of color," "minority," or even as identified by global region rather than by specific country. Likewise, how do the gender roles portrayed in dominant media codes compare with gender roles in students' cultures? What mismatch do they experience and possibly try to comprehend through media? Because of the linguistic imperialism of English, global capitalism, and the long reach of U.S. media products, many students familiar with aspects of American culture may both critique and be fascinated by American society at the same time. However, for international students, what they experience here and witness on television may have little bearing on the reality of their lives when they return home.

Previous experiences often make NNS students aware that "different kinds of meanings could be ascribed to the same events." Thus, in the creation of hegemonic meanings, Hall writes, "in order for one meaning to be regularly produced, it had to win a kind of credibility, legitimacy, or taken-for-grantedness for itself. That involved marginalizing, down-grading or de-legitimating alternative constructions" (Hall 1982:67). While students may be quite capable of finding alternate readings in these messages, they may not be prepared for the force with which alternate readings are often disparaged or dismissed in the United States.

Doing Media Literacy with NNS Students

In laying out the theoretical framework for using semiotics in teaching media literacy, I have used my own readings of two television programs, readings that reflect my own position as a white, upper-middle class, heterosexual highly politicized, well-educated woman. In teaching media literacy, however, I cannot assume that my students would read what I have interpreted in these programs. In fact, I may not agree with or enjoy their readings. Thus a media literacy curriculum needs to create spaces for different voices and interpretations. In some ways, because NNS students come with world views and subject positions that are necessarily different from those of most of their teachers, there is a natural opening for these differences.

Even without linguistic differences, class and ideological differences always exist. Buckingham criticizes the trend in media literacy instruction in which elitist middle-class teachers wittingly or unwittingly transmit their preferred deconstructions of media to their students such that decoding media becomes another rote task with previously known answers. Furthermore, he notes that "condemning programs . . . provides a powerful means of defining one's own tastes, and thus of

claiming a particular social identity" (Buckingham 1993:144) for both teachers and students.

Barthes noted a similar problem for someone undertaking analysis of one's own cultural myths,

> the mythologist cuts himself off from all the myth-consumers and this is no small matter. . . . To decipher the Tour de France or the `good French wine' is to cut oneself off from those who are entertained or warmed up by them. The mythologist is condemned to live in a theoretical sociality; for him, to be in society is, at best, to be truthful. . . . His connection with the world is of the order of sarcasm" (Barthes 1972:156).

However, postmodern theories may offer a path of escape for Barthes's mythologist. By encouraging multiple readings of media texts, teachers can preserve the pleasure viewers take in the media, rather than destroy it by analysis, although some students will feel that the analytical skills they learn prevent the innocent enjoyment of media that they previously experienced.

Semiotics can be useful in media literacy on many levels including analyses of content, production methods and techniques, narrative structure and visual images, competing ideologies, and autobiography (Brookfield 1986). In teaching adults, Brookfield suggests asking students to make comparisons between what they observe and their real-life experiences. "Autobiographical analysis asks learners to identify moments in their own lives when their experiences contradicted the television screen's picture of reality. . . . learners search their experiences for instances of perceived dissonance between life on TV and life as it is lived" (1986:167). Buckingham concurs: "Unless the discussion of ideology in media is related to students' own experience, to their sense of their own identity, it will remain a purely academic exercise: students will do images of women in the same way that they do medieval poetry" (Buckingham 1993:147).

Richard Fehlman offers a useful model of classroom analysis for "critically reading TV" (1992). He begins by showing a segment of the program, in his example, "The Wonder Years," and

having different groups of students focus on "audio cues: dialogue, music, and natural sound--or--quiet. What kinds of meanings are made through these codes?" Another group should "focus on elements of costume, make-up, character gesture and placement, set design, and props." The third group looks "at how the camera is placed and moved or the way individual shots are framed and generally composed" (1992:20).

The next level of Fehlman's analysis is genre, looking at how a program's "stories and style use formulaic language and conventions common to other [similar programs] on television" (1992:20). He incorporates "intertextuality" to show

how the opening credits, for example, should be "necessarily read in relationship to other [texts]" (Fiske 1987 cited in Fehlman 1992:20). Like Brookfield and Buckingham, Fehlman proposes to engage students with the media text by linking its messages and structures to their lives by writing in a response journal or analyzing the text using Hall's three reader points of view (21).

Fehlman next suggests a level of analysis that looks for cultural and ideological meanings by identifying how "media texts are indirectly suppportive of a status quo system of values: for example, beliefs about `happiness' and `security,' `authority' and `patriotism,' `femininity' and `masculinity,' `equality' and `freedom'," supplemented by an analysis of similar programs from the 1950s. (1992:22). Finally, Fehlman raises issues of the role of media in capitalism, including analyzing the commercials and the economics of making television programs.

By allowing space for the constant struggle of ideologies, hegemony theory enables teachers to situate themselves with their students as multifaceted subjects. By opening up possibilities for multiple interpretations rather than holding and trying to teach a conception of the one right way to understand media, the teacher of media literacy, unlike Barthes's "mythologist,"

does not have to be at a total remove from her students as subjects of media representations. Pedagogically, we can benefit from the fact that "there are many alternative frameworks or positions from which it is possible to interpret a text, and that different interpretations exist for the same set of images" (Graham 1989:158). We can teach critical media literacy without teaching a totalizing interpretations of the media texts under analysis.

References

Barthes, R. (1957, 1972). *Mythologies.* London: Jonathan Cape.

Brookfield, S. (1986, May). Media power and the development of media literacy: An adult educational interpretation. *Harvard Educational Review.* Vol. 56 No. 2, pp. 151-170.

Buckingham, D. (1993). Going critical: The limits of media literacy. *Australian Journal of Education.* Vol. 27, No. 2, pp. 142-152.

DeVaney, A. (1991). A grammar of educational television. In *Paradigms Regained.* D. Hlynka & J. Belland (Eds.) Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology Publications.

Dietzel, S.B. and Pagenhart, P. (1995). Teaching ideology to material girls: Pedagogy in the `postfeminist' classroom. *Feminist Teacher.* Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 129-136.

Ellsworth, E. (1997). *Teaching positions: Difference, pedagogy, and the power of address.* New York: Teachers' College Press.

Fehlman, R. (1992, Nov.). Making meanings visible: Critically reading TV. *English Journal.* pp. 19-23.

Fiske, J. (1990). *Introduction to communication studies.* 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

Giroux, H.A. and Simon, R. (1989). Popular culture and critical pedagogy: Everyday life as a basis for curriculum knowledge. In (Ed.) ??? *Critical pedagogy, the state, and cultural struggle.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Graham, R.J. (1989, Spring). Media literacy and cultural politics. *Adult Education Quarterly.* Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 152-160.

Hall, S. (??). Encoding/decoding. In *Media studies*, pp. 128-138.

_____ (1982). The rediscovery of `ideology': return of the repressed in media studies. In *Culture, society and the media.* London: Methuen.

Kellner, D. (1988). Reading images critically: Toward a postmodern pedagogy. *Journal of Education.* Vol. 170, No. 3, pp. 31-52.

Kottak, C.P. (19??). Anthropological analysis of mass enculturation. In *Unifying Themes.*??

Shor, I. and Freire, P. (1987). *A pedagogy for liberation: Dialogues on transforming education.* S. Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.